

Cityscape: Around Intown

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Patten leads Save the Fox celebration

By LAURA RAINES
For the Journal-Constitution.

Joe Patten, the "Phantom of the Fox," sees success all around him.

In 1974, Patten spearheaded Save the Fox. As a founding member of Atlanta Landmarks Inc., he helped convince Southern Bell, financial backers, city leaders and the public that the Moorish/Egyptian-styled Fox Theatre, complete with its mammoth 3,622-pipe Moller Deluxe organ, was not only irreplaceable, but it could be a viable cultural and entertainment showpiece for the city.

After mounting a widespread campaign that enlisted more than 7,000 major donors, Atlanta Landmarks paid off the \$1.8 million loan in 1978 to become owners and protectors of the Fox.

"We're so proud of what we've been able to accomplish," Patten said. "Since that day, we've never lost money, and I don't think there are that many theaters that could do that."

Long before the preservation efforts, Patten, an engineer with a lifelong fascination for organs, had restored the Mighty Mo in his spare time. After he became the technical director for the building, he oversaw the construction of a roof, repair of water damage, installation of humidity/heat-controlled rooms to protect the organ and the upgrading of just about every system, furnishing and feature of the building, thanks to money set aside from proceeds to renovate and maintain the building.

The 1929 Fox, with its ramparts, twinkling stars, moving clouds and soaring pipe organ, remains quite the attraction.

"There's not an inch of this building I don't know," said Patten, "but in everything we've done, we've acted as if [architect] Oliver J. Vinour [who designed the building in 1928] was look-



NICK ARROYO / Staff

Joe Patten, 76, has played a significant part in saving and restoring the Fox Theatre, in particular the preservation of the mammoth 3,622-pipe Moller Deluxe organ, also known as Mighty Mo.

ing over our shoulder. We made modifications so that the building could operate more efficiently, but we tried to do it the way he would have wanted it, and I think we've been successful," he said.

Patten earned his "Phantom of the Fox" nickname when he remodeled and moved into the old Shriner's offices under the Ponce de Leon side onion domes in 1981. His home not only gives him a clear view of improvements to the theater, but in the surrounding area.

"I've always voted at All Saints Episcopal Church, and for years there would be one or two other people with me. Now I have to stand in line. That means all these people live around here, and I'm all in favor of that," he said.

"Ponce de Leon is filled with new homes, and there's activity and quality construction up and down Juniper and Peachtree streets," Patten said. "I'm delighted to see the new Publix and all the fine restaurants around us. I think the Fox has been a nucleus for south Midtown. People have told me that our

being here has inspired others to come back," said Patten.

Patten will open the doors of his apartment Friday to attendees of the Save the Fox Silver Anniversary Gala, marking the 25th year since the group took ownership of the theater. Guests will enjoy his tiled fountain and Moorish-style furnishings, and can view the silent film "The Merry Widow," with a soundtrack of organ music played on the Mighty Mo, in his personal media room.

"It doesn't seem like 25 years, but when I look around, the results are so good, I guess it has been," said Patten, 76.

The Save the Fox Silver Anniversary Gala starts at 7 p.m. with cocktails in the Grand Salon, followed by dinner and dancing in the Egyptian Ballroom. Tickets are \$175. Call 404-688-3353, Ext. 11.

Tour preserved landmarks

There's never been a better time to see historic Atlanta than in the next 10 days. The Atlanta Preservation Center and 14 preservation partners are hon-

oring the Fox and other Atlanta landmarks with a 10-day festival. "The Phoenix Flies: A Citywide Celebration of Living Landmarks," runs Friday to March 9 and features free tours of the city's historic buildings, neighborhoods and parks.

"The Fox is the crown jewel in Atlanta's preservation history and marked a turnabout in the community's attitude toward saving its landmarks," said Chrissie Stevens Wayt, chairwoman of "The Phoenix Flies."

The Fox, Grant Park, Inman Park, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Oakland Cemetery, Druid Hills, Rhodes Hall and Swan House are a few of the landmarks on guided tours.

One of the festival highlights is a tour of the newly completed Georgia state Capitol building and grounds to be given by the preservation architects, Lord Aech & Sargent, who did the renovation, said Wayt. The Capitol tour is 5 to 6 p.m. Wednesday. Enter on Washington Street. For a complete tour schedule, see www.preserveatlanta.com/phoenixfliesevents.htm or call 404-688-3353.